

Project Metamorph-SIS: An Albert Schweitzer Humanitarian Community Offering

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Executive Summary

The Big Goal

To provide accessible, culturally rooted, alternative mental health care treatment for Black women experiencers/survivors of trauma navigating their healing journey.

The Need

Equitable access to culturally specific and rooted mental health care that uplifts Black women's lived experiences and empowers their healing journeys using the Black feminism and intersectionality lenses, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework.

Key Activities

A culturally rooted mental health support group in the form of a book club was implemented to highlight, educate, and bring awareness to the cultural and societal phenomena that impact the autonomy of Black women to navigate their healing journeys. By invoking the haven of kitchen table conversations, Black women experiencers of sexual assault were invited to raise their consciousness and reflect on their healing practices, conceptualize justice, and connect in the book club community.

Evaluation

Group activities were assessed and evaluated by use of the adapted SASHA Center Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan (SOAP) form and the Participant Self-Report Evaluation questionnaire. The evaluation tools were used to objectively measure the efficacy of the book club, and participants' attitudes, perceptions, and values related to their attendance in the group.

Findings

Participating Black women found strength in their identity and community to start or continue their healing journeys, with hopes of creating progress that has an intergenerational impact on liberation.

Project Background

Project Metamorph-SIS is a community service project that offers a culturally specific community-based prevention and intervention to promote health and mental wellness through culture and social support. Grounded in Black feminism, intersectionality, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework, this project aimed to provide a sacred space for Black women to find support, empowerment, and friendship while addressing physical and mental health disparities associated with race and gender-based trauma and environmental inequities. The goals of Project Metamorph-SIS were three-fold:

1. Promote connectedness and reduce the amount of experienced stress through culturally rooted activities and conversation for Black women who have experienced sexual trauma or are supporters of experiencers of sexual trauma.
2. Provide education for Black women experiencers of sexual trauma on how to reduce experienced stress through wellness, gardening, reflective journaling, and meditation techniques.
3. Cultivate a third space for Black women to be connected to and grow within the community.

Housed by the SASHA Center, a culturally relevant sexual assault agency specifically working with and on behalf of the Black community in Metro Detroit to provide mental health peer support groups, education, and advocacy, Project Metamorph-SIS offered the community group sessions that promoted the enhancement of psychosocial competence and provide effective

copied mechanisms aimed to empower and minimize stress in Black women survivors of trauma. To achieve the established goals, Project Metamorph-SIS prioritized the feasibility of offering culturally rooted mental health care and the engagement of experiencers of sexual assault during the Covid-19 pandemic, a task found difficult to attain, as the SASHA Center was not immune to how the pandemic shifted the center's normal means of providing services. This shift considers the disruption to the services, experiencers' difficulty obtaining access to the services due to technology, and experiencers' engagement with the services (Engleton et al., 2022).

With its focus on feasibility, Project Metamorph-SIS fulfilled two functions: 1) to connect with the lead program coordinator of the SASHA Center to learn the art of facilitation, provide culturally rooted activities and conversations, and present educational offerings on how to reduce stress; and 2) apply the acquired skills, activities, and connections to then implement a virtual community book club entitled "The Metamorph-SIS Book Club". This report will evaluate the effectiveness of the Metamorph-SIS Book Club, as it was an independent offering to the SASHA Center community, wherein I served as the lead facilitator. The purpose of the Metamorph-SIS Book Club, in a similar fashion to Project Metamorph-SIS, was three-fold:

1. Bring awareness to "experiencer" (SASHA Center, n.d.), a strengths-based term that describes someone who has experienced sexual assault and gives them autonomy to establish where they are on their healing journey.
2. Offer a safe space that honors where an experiencer is in their healing journey to then invite consciousness-raising into kitchen table conversations about the role of culture and society on healing practices and experiences.
3. Consider how experiencers conceptualize justice in the context of navigating the American justice system as a Black woman in the U.S.

When implementing the book club, it was critical to structure it as a mental health support group to honor the SASHA Center's processes and to evaluate the feasibility of the programming.

Within its structuring as a mental health support group, there was a need to propose a plan of work to steer the direction of the Metamorph-SIS Book Club. This plan of work evolved into a list of guiding questions and a curriculum. To guide the mental health peer support group, each session posed the following questions:

- How do I see my healing journey in the stories that I read?
- What do love and accountability look like?
- How do we love and hold people accountable?
- How does the community support me?

In focusing on the feasibility of implementing the book club, the following questions guided the overall process of the support group:

- What practices do Black women experiencers of sexual assault self-employ to encourage healing and manage trauma symptoms?
- What role do cultural and societal beliefs play in Black women experiencers of sexual assault's healing practices and experiences?
- How do Black women experiencers of sexual assault conceptualize accountability for harm doers?
- How does the Metamorph-SIS project contribute to experiencers' healing journey?

By centering Project Metamorph-SIS goals, the Metamorph-SIS book club's purpose, and the eight guiding questions, this work overall aimed to empower Black women experiencers of sexual assault in addition to highlighting the issue of sexual assault and the dearth of culturally rooted mental health care programming as a public health issue.

Methods

Participants. 30 Black women who identified as experiencers or survivors of sexual assault from Metro Detroit participated in the Metamorph-SIS Book Club. The women joined the group through social media advertisement and word of mouth. *Procedure.* The book club served as a drop-in space in which experiencers and survivors were able to participate in a close reading of the anthology “love WITH accountability: Digging up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse” edited by Aishah Shahidah Simmons, and includes reflective essays and poems written by and for Black women survivors of sexual assault. This text was chosen to discuss identity within Black womanhood and survival after sexual trauma from an intersectional lens, gendered racial socialization, managing trauma and grief, accountable love, and transformative justice. The book club was structured as an inviting, drop-in space for Black women to engage in kitchen table conversations on phenomena related to Black culture. These conversations were offered as 6 weekly sessions and a Facebook live to share the behind-the-scenes of the book club and allow the broader community to be a part.

Materials. For organization, the book club was guided by a curriculum that outlined each week’s content by welcoming activities to build social capital in the group, the purpose of the week, the chapter of discussion, discussion prompts, and reflective prompts. Participants were asked to either reach out to the SASHA Center for a copy of the text or, if they were financially able, to purchase their own copy. The text was not required for the participants to have, as we closely read the assigned chapter during the session each week.

Evaluation. To evaluate the effectiveness of the Metamorph-SIS Book Club, we implemented two assessment tools: 1) the Subjective, Objective, Assessment, and Plan (SOAP) form, and 2) Participant Self-Report Evaluation. These tools are regularly used at the SASHA

Center to evaluate the effectiveness of each peer support group and have been adapted to include culturally specific elements of the group, including topics discussed, specific quotes and excited utterances, interactive activities, and culturally relevant activities (i.e., ancestor reverence, prayer, sage, candles, meditation, water, crystals). Data was gathered using Google Forms, a survey tool through which the Participant Self-Report Evaluation questionnaire was accessed by participants and the SOAP form was accessed by facilitators. The SOAP form provides a preliminary evaluation of the functioning of the support group from the facilitator(s)'s point of view. By using the SOAP form, a facilitator can subjectively describe what participants reported or discussed, objectively discuss the dynamics of the group and any observations, assess the group's functioning, and use the information from S, O, and A to plan for the next session (Podder, Lew, & Ghassemzadeh, 2020).

The Participant Self-Report Evaluation questionnaire asked a series of 7 questions to gain participants' thoughts about how effective their participation in the group was to their healing journey. This questionnaire utilized a Likert scale to measure participants' attitudes, perceptions, and values related to their attendance in the group. Participants rated their agreeance to the following statements from 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree): "I feel like the people in my group understand what I'm going through", "I feel supported by the group facilitators", "So far, my presence in this group has supported my healing process", "So far, the content of this group has been relevant to my experiences", and "I feel comfortable and safe with the vibe of this group". There were also two short answer prompts that offered participants the opportunity to describe how the group has been helpful to their healing process and give feedback on the group content and processes. The Participant Self-Report Evaluation questionnaire was distributed during the 4th, 5th, and 6th sessions of the book club.

Findings

When assessing the group's functioning using the SOAP form, overall, the group reportedly were *"interactive"*, *"supportive"*, and *"considerate"*, and functioned *"cohesively"* with *"transparency"*. This functioning was evidenced by *"support for each other"* as they reportedly *"uplift[ed] each other in reflection"* and shared *"expressions of agreement with each other's statements"* and *"made room for each other to share their thoughts"*. These observations were reflected in the Participant Self-Report Evaluation, as participants shared their more intimate thoughts on the process of the mental health peer support groups and the space that they shared with one another.

83% of participants reported that their presence in the group has strongly supported their healing processes and that the content of the group has been relevant to their experiences. When asked how this group has been helpful to their healing process, participants described the group as *"safe space"*, and a place that *"allows me to feel and be present"*. Particularly, when describing the characteristics of the book club and the space it provided for the healing journey, a participant explained what they received from taking part in the group:

"The space to be free to discuss the experiences that harmed is so important. It's given me the strength to step into a healing journey and be more proactive, yet realistic about my healing."

In consideration of the book club's purposes to teach the term "experienter" and engage in critical thought and consciousness raising on navigating healing, one participant expressed their thoughts in this way:

“[The group has] been a light. Healing is a continuing process and any time you can be genuine and still be respected, that’s a win. That’s progress.”

Another participant reflected on the how their presence in the group impacted their healing journey from an intergenerational perspective:

“This group has been amazing in my healing process. Honestly, mostly because I was not actually dealing with my trauma. I worry so much about my child and children around me, but I understand that I can’t help them build a free future if I don’t deal with my own past. This group is the start of my journey.”

Overall, when evaluating the group, participants found the Metamorph-SIS Book Club to be a beneficial additive to their healing journeys, either by jump-starting their healing or affirming their identity in a healing space.

Discussion

Project Metamorph-SIS and the Metamorph-SIS Book Club are a step toward the necessary goal of decolonizing mental health treatment and care and increasing access to mental health treatment and care for Black women experiencers of trauma, with emphasis on sexual assault. By offering a free, inviting, culturally rooted community healing space, Black women were able to access their healing journey in an innovative way that was empowering and enriching to their identities and health. This group was an open, drop-in space. This drop-in space honored the complexity of Black women’s experiences as caretakers of their families and although there are limitations to this style of group, there was no effect on the efficacy of the

group, as findings show that participants enjoyed the content and their presence in the group space.

There are some limitations to this project. We did not implement a pre- or a post-test to measure or evaluate the development of the group or the effectiveness of the cultural activities performed in this group. Additionally, this project was still subjected to the Covid-19 pandemic, wherein participation was heavily reliant upon participant registration, word of mouth, and social media advertisement. Notably, when asked what the facilitators could do better, a participant reflected on her identity as one that did not fit into the common space:

“The facilitators have been wonderful and the content is wonderful but as a biracial black woman who is also an immigrant, it feels like I am intruding on a space where I shouldn't be.”

This comment provided room for reflection on how to provide for those who show up in healing spaces specifically dedicated to Black women whose ancestors were enslaved in the U.S.

Considering recommendations, the most common proposition by group participants was to have a longer duration of the Metamorph-SIS Book Club's offered sessions. As we collectively continue to build upon the book club's curriculum, in conjunction with accessing funding, then we plan to increase the number of sessions for participants to join, keeping in mind the viability and sustainability of this community offering.

References

- Engleton, J., Goodman-Williams, R., Javorka, M., Gregory, K., & Campbell, R. (2022). Sexual assault survivors' engagement with advocacy services during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Community Psychology*, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22819>
- Podder, V., Lew, V., Ghassemzadeh, S. (2020). SOAP Notes. *StatPearls Publishing*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK482263/>

Appendix

A. Flyer

SASHA CENTER
SOCIAL ASSISTANT SERVICES FOR HOUSEHOLDING AND WARRIORS

ZOOM MEETING

Kalimah Johnson
Facilitator

Tonije Reese

Larmendar Davis

Kendra Ventour

Co-Facilitator
AEYANNA YETT
SASHA Center MSW Intern

**METAMORPH-SIS
BOOK CLUB**
FEB 17 - MAR 31
EVERY THURSDAY FROM 6:00PM - 7:00PM

This 6-week group will focus on our healing journeys, self-recovery after trauma, and loving with accountability. Within this series, we will read chapters from the anthology, *Love WITH Accountability* by Aishah Shahidah Simmons, to discuss identity within Black womanhood from an intersectional lens, gendered racial socialization, managing trauma, grief, accountable love, and transformative justice. We will participate in relationship-building activities, read excerpts of the book, discuss, and reflect.

Join the zoom meeting by registering at <https://bit.ly/SCBookClub>

love WITH accountability
Digging Up the Roots of Child Sexual Abuse
Edited by Aishah Shahidah Simmons

B. Metamorph-SIS PowerPoint Sample

Metamorph-SIS Book Club

★

FEBRUARY 17 - MARCH 31 | SASHA CENTER

Purpose of Metamorph-SIS



EXPERIENCER

Someone who has experienced sexual assault.
- Kalimah Johnson



OFFERING

We honor you in your truth and want to understand how you feel society contributes to your experiences and your healing.



JUSTICE

Given how the American justice system maintains Black oppression, we wonder how you conceptualize justice.

"I learned that girls are not protected and that often the enablers of sexual pathology in the Black community were other, usually older, Black women"


— "Wolves & Aunties"

Reflective Prompt



How do you see your healing journey when practicing rituals or spirituality? What does your healing journey look like to you? What do you like to do when you are feeling down?



C. SOAP Form




SASHA CENTER
SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICES FOR
HOLISTIC HEALING AND AWARENESS

SASHA Center SOAP Form


(Rev. 1/2022) This form is to be completed by the Group's Lead Facilitator within 72 hours of group.




* Required


Date of Group *


Date
mm/dd/yyyy 


Start Time *

Time
: AM 

End Time *

Time
: AM 





How many participants were new to this calendar year? *

Your answer _____

Subjective *

What did the group members discuss today?

Your answer _____

Objective *

What were the dynamics of the group today, what did you see, observe, witness within the group?

Your answer _____

Assessment *

Based on what they said and what you saw, how did the group function today?

Your answer _____

Plan *

What will be next weeks' topic? What will you do with the group in consideration of information gathered?

Your answer _____

Culturally Specific Quotes from Participants: *

Such as language, food, hair, activities, mind, body, spirit?

Your answer _____



Interactive Exercise(s)? *

What did they work on as a group?

Your answer _____

Enhancement Activities? *

Use of ancestor reverence, prayer, sage, candles, meditation, Reiki, water, crystals, etc.

Ancestor reverence

Prayer

Sage

Candles

Meditation

Reiki

Water

Crystals

Call and Response

Other: _____


Safety Options?

Police, PPO, Environmental Changes, Decision Making, etc.?

Your answer _____






Evaluation Form



Group Evaluation | Metamorph-SIS Book Club


Please check the response that best matches how you feel, and kindly offer your thoughts. Your responses help us to make changes as needed.



* Required

Date of Evaluation *


Date
mm/dd/yyyy 


1. I feel like the people in my group understand what I'm going through. *

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree

2. I feel supported by the group facilitators. *

Strongly agree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly disagree





3. So far, my presence in this group has supported my healing process. *

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Strongly disagree |

4. So far, the content of this group has been relevant to my experiences. *

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Strongly disagree |

5. I feel comfortable and safe with the vibe of this group. *

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| Strongly agree | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | Strongly disagree |

6. Please describe how this group has been helpful for your healing process.

Your answer

7. What could the facilitators do better in the future?

